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India

# The Ahmednagar Hospital in India

*For Women and Children*



**J**UST outside the gates of the Ahmednagar hospital is a Hindu shrine to the idol Mahadev. Through all hours of the day the temple bell keeps ringing, as women entreat the stone image and lift praying hands for the longed-for blessing of a son. Long vigils, merciless fasts, offerings of marigold and jasmine are unavailing, for Mahadev hears not, nor cares.

Inside the hospital gates, in clean, airy wards, are crowds of women and children, who have come from near and far, because they have learned that the American doctors and nurse do care, that they are "jag-grata"—wide-awake, and ready at all times with their ministry of healing. Relatives and friends have told of marvelous experiences and of a strange new religion which knows no caste, where Brahmin and out-caste, rich and poor, may share alike in the limitless capacity and kindness of the "Bai Sahibs" from foreign lands. Such confidence have the sufferers in the "medicine water" and the wise, kind smiles of the

doctors, that they believe, as one of them said, "If she gives only water our women get well."

## Every Day Sufferers

Cases of all sorts come to the hospital, some pathetic, some amusing, some that grip the heartstrings. A boy of fifteen was brought in totally blind, both eyes having been burned with a red hot iron which had left an ugly scar directly across the pupils. The father admitted he had done it. A little girl of eleven was brought by her mother-in-law. The child had fallen down a well, and presented a dislocated jaw, a huge gash under her chin, a large scalp wound, and a badly crushed arm where the bone had pierced the flesh in two places. She stayed two months and when told she would soon be able to leave the hospital, she began to cry, and to protest that she did not want to go.

The doctor was recently called upon to visit a girl of fourteen who had borne her second child and who had been lying on the floor in a dark, dirty room, unconscious for two days. She was a pretty little thing and her husband a toothless old man. In the next house was a patient very ill with pneumonia, a woman of seventy. She was lying on a ledge jutting out of the wall in a dark corner, nothing under her but empty bags, nothing over her, no pillow for her head, no clean sheets, only an old *sari* wrapped around her.

## One Hospital That Helps

The American Hospital for Women and Children at Ahmednagar consists of a large two-story stone hospital building with wide verandas, a small isolation building for cholera, small-pox, etc., a nurses' home built of brick, and a bungalow for the American staff, besides suitable servants' quarters. The main building contains a children's ward, maternity ward, surgical and medical wards, private rooms with

three or four beds, and fairly well-equipped operating, lying-in and sterilizing rooms. The dispensary, drug and store rooms are on the ground floor. There are about fifty-eight beds indoors; cribs can be attached



FRONT OF HOSPITAL AND INDIAN STAFF

to these by a hook at each end. The tubercular patients are kept on the verandas, as there is no special building for them.

### **Recent Additions and Improvements**

Until lately emergency operations at night have had to be performed by the light of smoky kerosene lamps, but now electric lights are being installed in hospital and bungalow. The money for the fixtures was raised in India. An Indian woman's committee, largely non-Christians, known as the Bombay

Presidency Woman's Council, contributed 1000 rupees; a prominent Parsee merchant, whose wife had been a patient at the Ahmednagar Hospital, subscribed generously and sent out letters to friends asking for help. A septic tank has been built to care for sewage from the hospital, nurses' home and bungalow. Tanks have been built on the tops of these three buildings to supply them with sun-heated hot water for bathing and washing. The kitchens, store-rooms and servants' houses have been rebuilt on safe and deep foundations and solid walls without inch-wide cracks to let in rain, wind, rats and snakes.



DR. RUTH HUME

### The Beginnings

Dr. Julia Bissell of Wellesley College and the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania, opened a dispensary in a native house in 1895. Her efforts to acquire a well-equipped hospital resulted in the present building, which was formally opened in 1904 by the Governor of the Bombay Presidency, Lord Lamington. Her goal achieved, Dr. Bissell broke down in health and was obliged to leave the work, but her college has always helped to carry on her hospital.

### The Staff

Dr. Bissell was followed by Dr. Ruth Hume and Dr. Eleanor Stephenson, graduates of the same college and medical school. Dr. Stephenson gave ten years of devoted service and then left the hospital to be married. From 1912 to 1918 Dr. M. Clara Proctor reinforced the staff with her love and skill. Dr. Hume joined the Mission in 1903 and during her twenty

years of service has at times been obliged to carry on the hospital without an associate doctor. When leaving for furlough in 1921, she turned over the responsibility for the hospital to Dr. Harriet J. Clark of Seattle, a woman of large experience as a physician, with a background of overseas service in Greece with the Red Cross. Miss Elizabeth Johnson of Tabitha Hospital, Chicago, has been superintendent of nurses since 1908. To her patience and devotion, as well as that of the doctors, is due a large measure of the success of the nurses' training school, which is an important part of the institution.

The Indian staff consists of eighteen persons: the sub-assistant surgeon, Mathurabai Tekchand, who is a graduate of the Bombay High School and has taken a course at the Women's Christian Medical College in Ludhiana; two Bible women, one of whom, Baghubai Satralkar, has for thirty years conducted the daily service in the dispensary and visited the inpatients, the other, Marybai Mankar, having charge of the follow-up work in the homes; a matron, Jaibai, succeeding Tulsabai Rahator, who served loyally and competently for thirteen years; a compounder in charge of the drug-room, an



DR. HARRIET CLARK

Receiving garland and fruit sent by a grateful patient

assistant in charge of the operating room and twelve nurses.

## More About the Nurses

Nursing used to be considered a degrading occupation for girls, but that prejudice is gradually disappearing. Nurses can now earn good pay in government hospitals. Girls must be seventeen or over to be admitted to the Training School with its three-and-a-half-year course. Each one is expected to conduct alone twenty normal midwifery cases before

receiving her diploma. These home confinement cases and the village clinics give each girl a varied experience and responsibility for which she might well be envied by many a district nurse in America. This year most of the girls are former boarding school pupils.



MOHAMMEDAN FAMILY

The Wife a Hospital Patient

part of the medicine. Another woman who was to give a preparation that should be shaken, shook the

## Contending with Ignorance

One day a woman who was given a powder to take at once, took the paper the powder was wrapped in as

child instead of the medicine! When directed to give a medicine once in so many hours, people ask where the shadow will be when it should be given, for their only clock is the sun. Patients protest very forcibly against baths when they have fever. Ninety per cent of the children brought to the hospital have been fed opium most of their lives. It seems almost impossible to impress on uneducated women the danger of this practice, but girls educated in mission schools cannot be induced to give opium to their children. The staff have recourse to rewards and prizes, as well as to education and persuasion, in the matter of breaking the opium habit. For example, at Christmas time when former patients came for the special Bhajan service, every woman who had fed her baby no opium for a year was given a pretty jacket.

## With Caste

One day a very ill high-caste girl came to the hospital for medicine. Her husband consented to her staying when told it was her only chance for life. Although two caste cooks prepare the food for the non-Christian patients, they did not happen to be of her particular caste so she would have considered it an unforgivable sin to eat hospital food. It was arranged that her meals should be brought from home, but her mother-in-law who was opposed to her staying in the hospital would not send enough nourishing food and the girl grew weaker and weaker. It was impossible to make any impression on the heartless, obstinate old woman, and finally, rather than break her caste by eating what was forbidden, the girl went home to die.

The caste system seems a stone wall in the path of progress. Educated Indian men recognize this fact but until the Indian women also recognize it the wall will stand. A few weeks spent in this hospital



as a patient has led many a high-caste woman to see that she and her low-caste fellow patients have many things in common. She sees the Christian doctors and nurses working over sick, wretched outcasts; she begins to think, to feel pity and sympathy, and later to show these in some way. So the Christian hospital is one of the potent influences already undermining the caste barrier.

### **With Great Distances**

One morning a cart drove up to the hospital, two men and an old woman accompanying it on foot, and inside in a huddled heap on the bottom of the cart lay a woman at the point of death. When Dr. Clark remonstrated with the men for not bringing her earlier, she learned that they had been traveling for two days and two nights. After the patient was taken in and made comfortable and it was found that nothing could be done to save her life, her husband insisted on taking her home to die. When told that she would probably not live through the day, he replied resignedly, "If it is God's will what can I do?" and the sad little group set forth on their forty-eight hour trip.

Such a scene would be intolerable to remember were it not for the memories also of hundreds of cases where patients have not come too late; where the life of a child has been snatched from the jaws of death; where a woman who has suffered hopelessly for years has been relieved and restored to health by a single skilful operation; where an emaciated, wailing baby has been made over into a sturdy, rosy, happy child.

### **The Wellesley Ford**

The car given by Wellesley College to Dr. Hume will extend by many miles in every direction the usefulness of the hospital and saves much precious



time and strength. The doctor can now respond to a "hurry call" in a tithe of the time in which the old jolting two-wheeled carts could carry her. And village clinics can be extended further and further afield. The doctor takes medicines and a nurse to some of the scores of villages in the district. The local teachers or preachers gather into the schoolhouses all who need attention. Sometimes a single treatment is enough for a cure; in other cases medicines are left with the teacher to administer; yet others are urged to come to the hospital for treatment.

### **Preventive Work**

One of the doctors has often accompanied Bible women in their visits to the homes and has added to the Gospel story advice on hygiene, sanitation and the prevention of disease. She has given health talks at the Brahmin Women's Club and other women's meetings.

During the occasional epidemics of bubonic plague there is always a panic and a great demand for inoculation which people put off and evade as long as possible in normal times. They are gathered for the purpose in outlying villages by government agents and others; the doctor responds to the call, while inoculation goes on all day long at the hospital.

The Government, which is trying to stamp out plague in India, appreciates the efficient co-operation of the hospital and shows its appreciation in practical ways. The hospital has the privilege of securing drugs and supplies from the Government Medical Stores at much lower prices than market rates. In epidemics of small-pox and cholera, the hospital is a tower of strength in the community.

### **Best of All**

The message of Christ's love and pity is here written in a language even the illiterate can read. For

since the days in Galilee when Jesus laid His hands in healing on the sick there has been no surer way of reaching a sin-sick soul than through relief of a pain-sick body. The Bible women, Bhagubai and Marybai, supplement the work of doctors and nurses, and in the hospital the Indian women catch glimpses of an almost unbelievable hope. At Christmas when the story of a wonderful Son is told with all the charm of a Bhajan song service, it captivates their hearts. For in India preeminently do women understand God's priceless gift of His Son.

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*God had an only Son and He was a Missionary and  
a Physician. David Livingstone.*

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